

A Study on English Translation of Chinese Brand Slogans in Global Campaigns from an Intercultural Communication Perspective

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Abstract

Amid globalization and the national strategy of Intelligent Manufacturing in China, Chinese brands are accelerating their globalization. As a core carrier of brand communication across cultures, the translation quality of advertising slogans is of vital importance. Guided by the theory of intercultural communication, with particular reference to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Hall's High-/Low-Context Theory, this study constructs a three-dimensional analytical model encompassing values, linguistic signs, and aesthetic-emotional appeal to systematically examine the English translation of Chinese brand slogans. Through comparative analysis of successful and less successful cases, the study identifies three major issues in current practices: cultural misinterpretation, contextual information imbalance, and lack of aesthetic function, which stem from a systematic lack of intercultural awareness. Therefore, the study proposes that effective slogan translation should abandon the language-conversion-centered approach and instead adopt a composite strategy dominated by domestication, supplemented by transcreation and addition, to produce versions that are value-compatible, communicatively effective, and aesthetically appealing, which provides theoretical support and practical guidance for the international dissemination of Chinese brands.

Keywords: intercultural communication, advertising translation, translation strategies, brand internationalization

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the globalization of Chinese brands and the strategic transformation toward Intelligent Manufacturing in China, brand internationalization has evolved into a complex, multi-dimensional systematic project. As a highly condensed representation of brand philosophy and cultural connotations, advertising slogans serve as a critical bridge for connecting with global consumers emotionally

and establishing brand identity. However, the current quality of English translations for Chinese brand slogans is uneven: while successful cases effectively convey brand spirit, flawed translations—often due to literal rendering or neglect of cultural differences—can lead to impaired brand image and communication barriers. These phenomena indicate that slogan translation is far more than mere linguistic conversion; at its core, it involves

addressing deep-seated intercultural communication challenges, including overcoming differences in values, ways of thinking and aesthetic preferences between Chinese and Western cultures, as well as reconstructing brand identity and achieving effective communication in foreign cultural contexts.

Grounded in the perspective of intercultural communication theory, this study aims to systematically investigate the strategies and practices of English translation for Chinese brand slogans in the process of brand internationalization. The core research questions include: first, at the level of problem identification, analyzing the main intercultural communication issues and misconceptions in current English translations of Chinese brand slogans and exploring their root causes; second, at the level of translation strategy exploration, summarizing effective translation strategies to overcome cultural barriers and examining the specific mechanisms through which they resolve cultural conflicts in practical application; third, at the level of effect evaluation, establishing a set of criteria for assessing translated texts based on intercultural communication dimensions, and identifying the common characteristics and principles of successful translations.

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it situates translation studies within the framework of intercultural communication, moving beyond the traditional focus on intralingual conversion to emphasize the dynamic and purposeful nature of translation as a cross-cultural act, thereby broadening the research dimensions of applied translation studies. Moreover, by examining concrete cases of Chinese brand slogans, this study provides empirical support for intercultural communication theories and promotes their interdisciplinary integration and innovative development with translation studies. On a practical level, this study offers actionable strategies for Chinese enterprises to avoid cultural pitfalls and enhance the acceptability of their slogans in international markets, thereby strengthening global brand competitiveness. It also serves as a reference for translation practitioners and learners, providing a target-audience-centered approach to achieve communicative functionality. Additionally, at the strategic national level, by effectively conveying the image of Chinese enterprises, it

contributes practical pathways for enhancing the country's cultural soft power.

2. Current Research Status on Brand Slogan Translation at Home and Abroad

Research on brand slogan translation exhibits a notable imbalance between domestic and international scholarship. Regarding the translation of Western brand slogans into Chinese, studies have reached a relatively mature stage, primarily focusing on how global brands such as Coca-Cola, Nike, and Apple achieve effective localization through strategies like domestication and transcreation. These studies often employ theoretical perspectives such as functional equivalence and reception aesthetics to explore the translation mechanisms that facilitate successful market penetration, thereby providing this research with rich strategic examples and methodological references.

In contrast, research on the outward translation of Chinese brands, particularly in the field of English translation of advertising slogans, remains in a developmental phase. Existing studies generally suffer from the following limitations: Firstly, the research perspective tends to be simplistic, mostly confined to traditional translation techniques (e.g., literal translation, free translation), without delving into conflicts at the level of cultural values from an intercultural communication theory perspective. Secondly, there is insufficient theoretical application; while the impact of cultural differences is widely acknowledged, few studies systematically employ Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory or Hall's High-/Low-Context Theory as analytical tools, resulting in a lack of theoretical depth. Thirdly, strategy summaries are often overly generalized; proposed recommendations are mostly limited to macro-level principles and fail to integrate with specific cultural dimensions (e.g., individualism/collectivism, high-/low-context), thus offering limited practical guidance.

In response to the above research gaps, this study aims to adopt intercultural communication theory as its core framework to systematically analyze cases of English translations of Chinese brand slogans. It seeks to explore the root causes of existing issues from the perspectives of cultural values and semiotic transformation, with the goal of constructing a theoretically grounded and practically feasible

translation strategy system to provide concrete references for the international dissemination of Chinese brands.

3. Core Concepts of Intercultural Communication Theory and Their Application in Translation

Translation is, in essence, an act of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication. Therefore, intercultural communication theory provides an indispensable macro theoretical framework for translation studies, particularly in the field of applied translation. This study is grounded in Intercultural Communication Theory, which posits that effective communication relies not only on linguistic accuracy but also on the insight into and adaptation to deep-seated cultural differences. From this perspective, advertising translation can be viewed as an act of semiotic transformation aimed at achieving cross-cultural understanding and fulfilling communicative functions. This study primarily draws on two classical theoretical models as analytical lenses to examine the core issues in advertising slogan translation.

3.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory provides a systematic analytical framework for cross-cultural comparison and translation studies, particularly suited for investigating the transmission and adaptation mechanisms of cultural values. The theory reveals profound differences in cognitive patterns and social behaviors across cultures at the level of values through dimensions such as power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, and long-term/short-term orientation.

In the practice of advertising slogan translation, these dimensions serve as critical references for identifying cultural conflicts and selecting adaptation strategies. For instance, authoritative expressions prevalent in high-power-distance cultures may need to be transformed into appeals for equality in low-power-distance societies. Concepts such as unity and win-win, common in collectivist contexts, often require individualized adaptation in individualistic cultures. Furthermore, differences in cultural tolerance for uncertainty, achievement orientation, and time perception directly influence the target audience's receptivity to ways of commitment, emotional appeals, and

value propositions.

Thus, this theory demands that translators move beyond superficial linguistic conversion, deeply identify differences in cultural dimensions, and employ cultural adaptation strategies such as value reconstruction, appeal transformation, or creative rewriting to ensure effective communication of the translated text. The ultimate goal is to facilitate the alignment and integration of values in intercultural communication, rather than merely accomplishing information transfer (Ren & Zhao, 2023).

3.2 Hall's High- and Low-Context Cultures Theory

In his 1976 work *Beyond Culture*, Edward T. Hall first systematically proposed and elaborated the theory of High-Context Culture and Low-Context Culture, providing a critical analytical framework for intercultural communication and translation studies. This theory categorizes cultures into two types: high-context cultures (e.g., China, Japan) rely on context, non-verbal cues, and shared knowledge to convey information, often expressing meaning implicitly and indirectly; whereas low-context cultures (e.g., the United States, Germany) tend to encode information through explicit and direct language, emphasizing clarity and precision.

In advertising slogan translation, this theory directly influences translators' strategies at the linguistic and semiotic levels. Chinese, as a high-context language, often embeds cultural allusions, metaphors, and collective memory in its advertisements, making the message highly context-dependent. When translating into English, a low-context language, translators must explicate implicit information by supplementing logical connections and cultural background to prevent comprehension barriers for the target audience. Conversely, when translating from a low-context to a high-context culture, redundant expressions may need simplification to adapt to implicit communication norms. This process also serves as a key basis for choosing domestication or foreignization strategies.

Thus, Hall's theory not only reveals how cultural differences manifest in communication styles but also provides practical principles and methods for addressing contextual disparities in translation, particularly in advertising translation, where effectiveness and

acceptability are paramount.

Additionally, in intercultural communication, values—as the core of culture—profoundly shape individuals' cognitive and behavioral patterns. Symbols, as external carriers of values (including language, images, colors, and numbers), possess culturally specific meanings that may elicit completely different interpretations across social contexts. For example, the “dragon” symbolizes auspiciousness in Chinese culture but is often associated with evil in the West; “white” represents purity in Western cultures yet is linked to mourning in some Eastern societies. Due to this cultural dependency of symbolic meaning, culturally loaded terms, metaphors, symbols, and humor in advertising slogans constitute core challenges in translation. Therefore, translators must possess acute intercultural awareness to identify potential semantic associations and emotional responses triggered by source-culture symbols in the target culture. Then, based on the principle of functional equivalence, strategies such as substitution, explanation, or omission should be employed to avoid cultural misinterpretation and ensure both the effectiveness of message delivery and the achievement of communicative intent.

4. Characteristics and Principles of Advertising Translation

As a specialized form of applied translation, advertising translation is not merely a process of linguistic code-switching but rather a cross-cultural recreation based on the source text, with the ultimate goal of achieving commercial communication objectives.

According to Katharina Reiss's (2000) text typology theory, advertising texts fall under the category of vocative texts, whose core function is to persuade the reader to take specific actions, such as stimulating purchase intent or building brand identity. Therefore, the primary principle of advertising translation is to pursue functional equivalence at the effect level rather than formal equivalence at the textual level (Nida, 2001). The ultimate criterion for evaluating a translated text lies in its ability to elicit psychological responses and behavioral feedback in the target cultural audience that are similar to those evoked in the source audience, thereby fulfilling its persuasive intent.

From this functionalist perspective, the concept

of faithfulness undergoes a fundamental shift: what the translator remains faithful to is not the literal form of the source text but its marketing purpose and communicative effect. This grants translators considerable freedom to engage in creative transformation (transcreation) beyond the surface structure of the language. Commonly employed strategies include the following: first, transcreation, which involves completely departing from the source text structure to recreate content based on the brand's core values within the target culture; second, adaptation, which refers to replacing source-cultural imagery with widely recognized symbols in the target culture to enhance acceptability; third, omission and addition, whereby content that may cause comprehension barriers due to cultural differences is removed, while necessary background information implicit in the source text is explicated; fourth, aesthetic reconstruction of language, which emphasizes refining the rhythm, cadence, and rhetoric of the translated text to ensure it possesses the same appeal and communicability as native-language advertisements in the target context.

In summary, the essence of advertising translation lies in strategic rewriting within cross-cultural contexts to achieve specific functions. This process heavily relies on the translator's insight into the target market's cultural cognition and linguistic habits, as well as their creativity.

5. Research Design and Case Analysis

5.1 Research Design

This study primarily employs the case analysis method within qualitative research. This approach is suitable for in-depth and detailed exploration of complex social phenomena such as cross-cultural advertising translation, aiming to elucidate the underlying motivations and operational mechanisms. Case analysis facilitates a systematic and multidimensional examination of the English translation practices of Chinese brand advertising slogans in real-world contexts. By comparing successful and unsuccessful translation examples, it effectively reveals the applicability of translation strategies and the principles of intercultural communication, thereby achieving a progression from concrete experience to theoretical understanding and providing comprehensive contextualized empirical support for the

research questions.

Integrating classical theoretical models with the characteristics and principles of advertising translation, this study constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework to systematically evaluate the English translation practices of Chinese brand advertising slogans. First, the *values dimension* employs cultural dimensions theory to examine whether the translation aligns with the value orientations of the target culture, such as adaptations between individualism and collectivism or long-term and short-term orientations. Second, the *linguistic signs dimension* draws on high-/low-context theory to analyze the treatment of culturally loaded terms, rhetorical devices, and implicit information, assessing whether functional equivalence and effective communication are achieved in low-context cultures. Third, the *aesthetic-emotional dimension* comprehensively evaluates whether the translation possesses appeal and resonates with the target audience in terms of rhythm, imagery, and emotional appeals (Zhang H, 2009), ensuring it aligns with the artistic and persuasive functions of advertising texts. This framework aims to provide a systematic and operable analytical path for the cross-cultural adaptation mechanisms of advertising translation from the perspectives of cultural values, semiotic transformation, and aesthetic experience.

5.2 Corpus Selection Criteria and Sources

To ensure the representativeness, credibility, and operability of the research, the corpus for this study was selected based on the following criteria:

- (1) Industry Representativeness: Covering dominant and emerging sectors in Chinese brands' globalization, such as consumer electronics, home appliances, automobiles, cosmetics, and internet services.
- (2) Market Influence: Prioritizing brands with high international visibility and widespread attention in global markets.
- (3) Translational Comparability: Cases must include both the original Chinese slogan and its official English translation, with the translation demonstrating significant discussion value (e.g., widely acclaimed, controversial, or evidently flawed).
- (4) Timeliness: Focusing primarily on cases from the post-2010 period, coinciding with the

accelerated phase of Chinese brands' internationalization, to enhance the practical relevance of the study.

The corpus was sourced from:

- (1) Official international websites and English-language pages of the brands;
- (2) The official accounts on mainstream overseas social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Facebook);
- (3) Official press releases and video materials from globally launched advertising campaigns;
- (4) Coverage of international marketing activities of relevant brands by authoritative business media outlets (e.g., Bloomberg, Reuters).

Ultimately, this study selected four core cases for in-depth analysis.

5.3 Typical Case Analysis

5.3.1 Analysis of Successful Cases

Case 1: Huawei

Chinese Slogan: “构建万物互联的智能世界”

English Translation: “Bring digital to every person, home and organization for a fully connected, intelligent world.”

Multidimensional Analysis:

Values Dimension: The translation demonstrates a strategic shift from collectivism to individualism in cultural dimensions. The original Chinese phrase, “构建万物互联的智能世界,” exhibits typical collectivist-oriented and grand-narrative characteristics. In contrast, the English version concretizes the abstract vision by specifying “every person, home and organization,” transforming it into an empowering promise targeting individuals and independent entities. This aligns with the cultural cognition of Western markets, which emphasize individual value and independent units, reflecting the appeal of individualism in Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. This approach represents a clear domestication strategy.

Linguistic Signs Dimension: The translation effectively achieves a shift from high-context to low-context communication through explicitation and elaboration. The highly condensed concept of “万物互联” (wan wu hu lian) in the original Chinese carries rich high-context cultural connotations. The translation wisely supplements “Bring digital

to” to clarify the agent and means of implementation. Simultaneously, it decomposes “智能世界” (zhi neng shi jie) into “fully connected, intelligent world,” explicitly conveying core technical features and the ultimate state. This meets the low-context culture’s demand for informational clarity and logical explicitness, demonstrating the application of Hall’s High-/Low-Context Theory in translation practice.

Aesthetic-Emotional Dimension: The translation enhances appeal and memorability through syntactic parallelism and rhythmic control. Although the English version is longer, the parallel structure of “every person, home and organization” creates a smooth rhythmic flow. It conveys an emotional tone of inclusivity, technological empowerment, and a positive future, aligning with the optimism and humanistic care that technology brands must exhibit. This successfully fulfills the emotional appeal function of advertising texts.

Case 2: DJI

Chinese Slogan: “未来无所不能”

English Translation: “The Future of Possible”

Multidimensional Analysis:

Values Dimension: The translation acutely captures the differences between Chinese and Western cultures in the uncertainty avoidance dimension. The absolutist tendency conveyed by the Chinese phrase “无所不能” (wu suo bu neng, meaning omnipotent) could easily raise doubts about the authenticity of the promise in Western cultures, which typically exhibit low uncertainty avoidance. In contrast, the English translation “The Future of Possible” skillfully shifts the narrative focus from “omnipotence” to “possibility,” emphasizing exploration, potential, and open-ended innovation. This not only effectively avoids cultural conflict but also precisely aligns with the Western cultural value orientation that prioritizes developmental processes and future opportunities.

Linguistic Signs Dimension: This case is a typical example of the transcreation strategy. The translator completely broke free from the literal constraints of the original phrase “无所不能,” deeply deconstructed and extracted the brand’s core spirit of pushing the boundaries of technology, and conducted a successful semiotic recreation grounded in the target culture. The result is a highly original, concise, and

immensely communicable English expression that achieves the cross-cultural transmission of the brand’s core value.

Aesthetic-Emotional Dimension: The translation constructs a strong sense of futurism and technological aesthetics through minimalist wording and grand philosophical undertones. “The Future of Possible” features symmetrical structure and condensed rhythm, conveying high confidence while appearing inclusive and humble due to its open-ended expression. This perfect integration of forward-looking vision, artistry, and technological appeal significantly enhances the brand’s emotional appeal and image sophistication.

5.3.2 Analysis of Less Successful Cases

Case 1: A Well-Known Tea Brand

Chinese Slogan: “品茗思韵，传承千年”

English Translation: “Taste tea and think rhyme, inherit thousand years.”

Multidimensional Analysis:

Values Dimension: The translation fails to achieve an effective transformation of cultural dimensions. The Chinese phrase “传承千年” (chuan cheng qian nian) embodies the long-term orientation characteristic of Chinese culture, emphasizing historical continuity and temporal accumulation. However, the literal translation “inherit thousand years” not only suffers from grammatical errors that render the meaning ambiguous but also appears hollow due to a lack of cultural adaptation. It fails to establish value resonance with Western audiences and cannot convey the brand’s historical depth and cultural richness.

Linguistic Signs Dimension: This case reveals a severe neglect of the principles governing high-/low-context conversion. The term “思韵” (si yun) in the original slogan is a high-context culturally loaded word, blending the dual connotations of contemplation during tea tasting and cultural charm. The rigid translation “think rhyme” not only completely loses the core imagery but also creates confusing ambiguity, leading to semantic deviation and cognitive barriers. The overall translation adheres rigidly to literal correspondence, lacking necessary explanatory additions or imagery reconstruction, resulting in the complete failure of high-context cultural information in a low-context culture.

Aesthetic-Emotional Dimension: The

translation exhibits severe issues in acceptability. Awkward grammatical structures and inappropriate lexical choices (e.g., “inherit thousand years”) deprive the text of basic linguistic fluency, let alone the elegant aesthetics and profound experience inherent in tea culture. The mechanical translation utterly destroys the poetic rhythm and cultural ambiance of the original phrase, making it difficult for the target audience to generate any positive emotional associations or aesthetic experiences. Ultimately, this leads to a failure in intercultural communication.

Case 2: An Early Slogan of an Automobile Brand

Chinese Slogan: “稳坐江山，驭享人生”

English Translation: “Sit Stable the Country, Drive and Enjoy Life.”

Multidimensional Analysis:

Values Dimension: The translation exposes a severe neglect of the power distance cultural dimension. The Chinese idiom “稳坐江山”(wen zuo jiang shan) carries distinct imperial imagery and a sense of power control, reflecting the reverence for authority and status in high-power-distance cultures. However, its literal translation, “Sit Stable the Country,” is prone to political misinterpretation and audience discomfort in low-power-distance Western cultures. The implied ambiguity of “controlling the country” not only conflicts with mainstream values of equality and freedom but also completely deviates from the brand’s intended core message of the joy of driving.

Linguistic Signs Dimension: This case demonstrates a breakdown in semiotic chains due to mechanical literal translation. The translator failed to recognize “稳坐江山” as a high-context cultural idiom with a holistic metaphorical function, erroneously adopting a word-for-word correspondence strategy that resulted in semantic absurdity and logical confusion. Meanwhile, the aesthetic conception of “驭享”(yu xiang), which blends the notions of mastering and enjoying, is entirely lost in translation, reduced to the emotionally flat “Drive and Enjoy.” This reflects a complete disregard for the cultural connotations and contextual dependency of the source-language symbols.

Aesthetic-Emotional Dimension: The translation creates severe reception barriers and

emotional misalignment. The awkward and bizarre wording, coupled with distorted semantics, fails to convey the original phrase’s grandeur and philosophical outlook on life, instead provoking confusion and negative associations. Its linguistic style runs counter to the positive emotions of pleasure, freedom, and sophistication that automobile advertisements should evoke. Ultimately, this not only leads to communicative failure but also causes irreparable damage to the brand image.

6. Findings and Discussion

This study systematically analyzes the issues, strategies, and evaluation dimensions in the English translation of Chinese brand advertising slogans. The main findings are as follows:

First, current translation practices are plagued by three interconnected issues: cultural misinterpretation and conflict, arising from misplaced cultural imagery or violated taboos due to excessive literal translation; contextual information imbalance, wherein high-context sources fail to be explicated, resulting in ineffective semantic transfer; and aesthetic and functional deficiencies, where translations lack the emotional appeal and persuasive force necessary to fulfill communicative intent. These problems stem fundamentally from a systematic deficit in intercultural awareness, epitomized by translators’ prevalent one-sided belief that linguistic conversion takes precedence over cultural adaptation—thus reducing translation to mere code-switching—coupled with an insufficient understanding of Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory, which leads to mismatched value propositions in the target culture, and a weak grasp of Hall’s High-/Low-Context Theory, resulting in the failure to achieve effective recoding of cultural information.

Second, regarding translation strategies and their applications, effective advertising translation necessitates the adoption of composite strategies grounded in in-depth cultural analysis. Among these, transcreation stands out as the most efficient approach to addressing cultural differences, particularly for culturally loaded texts or those with tightly bound form-meaning relationships, as it reconstructs core brand values to align with the target culture. Domestication, as a commonly used strategy, facilitates target-context integration through cultural imagery

substitution and value proposition adaptation, while addition serves as a key technique for handling high-/low-context disparities by explicating logical relationships and background information to achieve informational equivalence. In contrast, literal translation or foreignization has limited applicability, typically being reserved for universal cultural imagery or scenarios where brands intentionally highlight cultural heterogeneity. For mass consumer markets, a domestication-oriented approach, strategically combined with transcreation and addition, yields optimal communicative outcomes.

Finally, regarding translation evaluation, this study proposes a systematic assessment across three intercultural dimensions: value compatibility, which examines whether the translated value proposition aligns with the target cultural dimensions; communicative effectiveness, referring to the clarity of brand message delivery and adherence to low-context expression norms; and aesthetic-emotional appeal, concerning the translation's phonological rhythm and emotional impact to resonate with the target audience. Successful translations are generally characterized by target-audience-centricity, reading as if originally crafted for the specific cultural context; functional equivalence with the original commercial persuasive intent; and global sublimation of brand value, whereby regionally specific cultural features are transformed into universal emotional propositions.

The English translation of Chinese brand advertising slogans constitutes a complex process of cross-cultural reconstruction. Its ultimate success hinges on whether translators can be guided by intercultural communication theory and flexibly employ strategies such as domestication and transcreation to produce translations that seamlessly align with the target audience in terms of values, communicative function, and aesthetic appeal. This process demands that translators evolve from passive linguistic artisans into proactive intercultural communication experts and co-creators of brand value, thereby effectively enhancing the soft power of Chinese brands in global communication.

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